

Title: Tal'khaz-mir [1]

Author:

*a dark tale found
within a crumbling tome
in the Necropolis*

A frosty chill wind
propelled powdery snow
through the air with
stinging pressure, creating
and building upon
pre-existant drifts.
Lightning cracked the
cloudy sky, and the moon
above barely peirced the
canopy of darkness enough
to illuminate the
surrounding landscape. It
was barren here, almost
mournfully empty; not a
tree in sight, and the
only sound was the
howling wolves and wind.
The few animals who
inhabited Dagger Isle
huddled in their hidden
caves and dens along the
mountainside, struggling
for warmth within their
thick, pristine hides.

Somewhere along the
mountain was a passage,
beaten by snow and ice,
which lead to an ancient
network of caves and
stonework. It was a
dungeon, Deceit as it
would later be named, and
Tal'khaz-mir stood only a
few feet within, holding a
torch high in a gloved
hand. He was bedecked in
dark, thick robes and
thigh-high boots, with a
thick hat and scarf to
help him stay warm. Down
here he thought perhaps
he would be protected
from the wind, but nay,

there was a deeper chill
here, one that went
straight to the bone.

The air stunk of rotting flesh, and Tal'khaz-mir nearly jumped with surprise when he noted a distant figure, shambling slowly toward him. Hastily, his sword was drawn and he stepped forward, holding it at the ready should the figure prove hostile. Light from his torch glimmered upon his polished valorite blade; low-burning lamps and glowing sigils upon the walls and ground added to the eerie splendor of what seemed like an ancient tomb.

As the figure slowly limped into the light, Tal'khaz gasped in horror. Its flesh was covered in disgusting wounds, some so deep that bone showed beneath; it had turned green with rot and age, and smelled of hollow death. There was no life in its eyes, only cold understanding in its purpose. It had to protect its home and its age-old family, which meant adding another to the eternal damnation the dungeon's curse would offer. It crept closer, lifting a gnarled arm to strike.

The arm was severed with the blink of an eye, and directly following it with a side-swipe of Tal's sword was the zombie's head. Somehow though, bound by magic, it crept on, striking with its other arm. Tal parried the clumsy blow with his blade and kicked the foul beast in the ribs, sending

it stumbling backward. He advanced and hacked viciously at its leg until it seemed to come apart at the seams. With enough damage dealt, the enchantment was broken and it fell limp to the cold stone floor.

Tal stared at the corpse for a few moments, unblinking, until he heard a strange noise to the northwest, echoing down the hallway. It sounded like a growl, powerfully issued and strong. Never claiming caution over curiosity, the man slowly crept in the direction of the sound, footsteps soft against the stone beneath him, yet loud in the silence that had been undisturbed for so very long. He paused at an intersection; two passages sprung out to his left and right, while the main tunnel kept going straight. He decided to try left, since it was to the west, where he had heard the noise.

Inside the chamber, he could see a brazier filled with glowing red embers. A feeling of dread crept over his figure, pouring into his veins and quickening his heartbeat. Something about this sight defied the natural order without reason, and he could recognize that clearly, that something was very wrong, yet he couldn't put a finger on it. Again, his curiosity won the day, and he stepped closer. Soon, his fear had melted into intrigue, and he was completely fascinated and charmed by the device. He stared at it

unblinking, moving slowly closer.

A stiff breeze rushed through the room and devoured the flame of his torch. Tal'khaz-mir did not seem to care. He dropped the lightless object and let his arms hang idly at his side, having sheathed his sword back in the tunnel. He could feel the heat of the coals on his skin, even through his many layers of clothing, but he still did not seem to care. He tilted his head, and slowly began to extend his hand toward the coals. Had he lost his mind? Had he gone utterly insane?

The hand crept closer and closer to the coals; his glove caught on fire from the heat, spreading to the sleeve of his robe, but he did not seem to care. He layed his hand upon the coals, and it was then that a mystical blue-white energy surged through his fingertips and channeled up his arm, spreading to the rest of his body. The heat didn't seem to affect his skin, leaving no marks or burns. Oddly, instead of darkening it seemed to lighten, growing pale, as if he were a ghost.

His eyes gleamed a vile red, and slowly he lifted his hand from the coals. His voice was inhuman and low, incredibly powerful. "Et aahl az'rah-tu mel khas..." His voice slowly began to blend from an ancient language to the modern speech of man. "...I am finally free." He

slowly blinked his eyes,
bowed his head and
strode back the way he
had came. Instead of
turning toward the
entrance at the
intersection, though, he
headed deeper into the
depths of the dungeon.

A group of thirteen
white-robed individuals
gathered around a massive
tower built of bone and
mortar, each chanting
alone with one another.
One stood in front of
the rest, holding a golden
staff as high as his arm
would allow. He shouted
praises to righteous gods,
willing them to banish
what they had dubbed a
temple of evil and dark
repute. It was known to
them as destruction,
darkness, death and decay.
It was known to those
who researched as
Golgotha, the Tower of
Bone.

A figure stood calmly
inside, his head shaved
and bare, pale and
gleaming in the dim blue
light cast by runes
etched into the walls. He
wore a massive suit of
gleaming black platemail,
all save for the helm,
with a dark blue robe
worn over it. He held a
valorite sword, polished
and well-kept, runes
carved into the blade
with a hilt long enough to
be held with two hands.
It resembled an ancient
design used many decades
before, when raiders had
first come to the frozen
slab of rock.

The figure looked up, eyes
glowing a bright shade of

red, his highly intelligent demeanor and strength apparent, even without a display. The group outside could *feel* his evil throbbing through the ground like shockwaves of an earthquake, or possibly silent thunder pulsing through the air in crushing waves, the heartbeat of a long dead island... slowly, the man turned, and began to ascend the stairwell that lead to the tower's roof. Bone crunched beneath his heavy step, but it reformed again behind him, stirring until it had resumed its original position.

The figures outside chanted more fervently as the silhouette of a man appeared on the top of the tower, slowly moving to its edge and looking out at them, a cruel, knowing smile upon his dark lips. "Mach`ahl-zen.. bah.. et.. lum.. ol gheist..." His words were painfully slow, deep and powerful, like the concussion blast of a vicious explosion. Dust spilled past his lips with each utterance, as if he had not spoken or even moved in centuries. As the moments passed, as each word was spoken, he began to speak faster.

"Baal et yahn le pa wael mahn..."

The men below froze, as if commanded by some ancient magic. Their breath had been stolen as easily as if an experienced tailor were pulling a needle through thin cloth, or a blade fresh from the forge slicing through already

warm butter. It seemed so easy to the seasoned force of evil; there was no passion to his voice, only inflection where the spell deemed appropriate. Slowly his free hand clenched tightly into a fist, and he twisted it in the empty air, vicious cold wind beating against his dark gauntlet. The men below all fell to their knees, clutching their hearts, except one, the man who held the staff.

It seemed as if the silence spell had been broken, and the staff-weilder spun it 'round twice, uttering a single arcane phrase. As the spell climaxed, he withdraw a gemstone from a pocket of his robe; it was an odd gem, completely round and flawless. With the sheer strength of his spell, the souls of all twelve men around him were sucked into the gem, and the thirteenth, the essence of Tal'khaz-mir, the man standing atop the tower, possessed by daemons, was devoured by the gem. Twelve guardians in eternity for one vile demonic force.

The lifeless figure of Tal'khaz-mir slowly descended into the forgotten cellars of Golgotha, disappearing into darkness, willed there and controlled by the evil that was Golgotha. The robed man smiled somberly, turned, and stepped away into the blinding snowstorm. His work was done at the cost of twelve comrades, who had come unknowing

of what must be done.

*continued in volume
two*